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ABSTRACT

In 1986, the Ontario Women's Directorate launched the Change Agent Program to encourage the development of workplace equity programs and to share information and knowledge gained by these programs so that others might benefit from them. This report describes a 20-month pilot project, Education at Work, a joint labor-management initiative between the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 79 and Metro Toronto's Homes for the Aged Division. Its purpose was to help entry-level Nursing Attendants qualify to enroll in Registered Nursing Assistant programs while they continued to work. This report explains how the project worked, who was involved, and how they felt about it. For the students, this pilot project was highly successful. It provided upgrading equal to high school-levels in English, pre-pharmacology, math and biology. Not only were students able to move up the career ladder, they gained added confidence and a greater self-awareness. The success of the project changed the attitude of people on the Equal Employment Opportunity Committee at Metro Council. It created a model for a better working relationship between workers and management. (JBJ)

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EDUCATION at WORK

A LABOUR-MANAGEMENT RETRAINING PROJECT

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EDUCATION at WORK

A CHANGE AGENT PROJECT

by the

ONTARIO WOMEN'S DIRECTORATE

and

CUPE LOCAL 79

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THE CHANGE AGENTS

Change Agents are trendsetters. They are the unions, employers, employer associations, community organizations and others who work with the Ontario Women's Directorate to turn innovative ideas on workplace equity into real gains for women.

In 1986, the Ontario Women's Directorate launched the Change Agent Program to encourage the development of workplace equity programs in the workplace and to share the information and knowledge gained by these programs so that others may benefit from them. Through case studies, publications, videos and other resources resulting from these initiatives, the Change Agent Program has made available an impressive array of resources to employers and others.

The Ontario Women's Directorate is pleased to add this publication, EDUCATION AT WORK: A Labour – Management Retraining Project, to its list of workplace equity materials. For more information on the Change Agent Program, please contact:

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ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This report is about a success story. It describes a 20-month pilot project, Education at Work, a joint labour-management initiative between CUPE Local 79 and Metro Toronto's Homes for the Aged Division. Its purpose: to help entry-level Nursing Attendants qualify to enrol in Registered Nursing Assistant programs while they continued to work. The report explains how the project worked, who was involved, and how they felt about it. It is a success story because the people involved proved it could be done. This has set a hopeful precedent for the future.

The success of the Education at Work project changed the attitude of everybody on the Equal Employment Opportunity Committee at Metro Council. It created a model for a better working relationship between workers and management.

Steven David
President
CUPE Local 79

The report describes the program's goals as well as its obstacles. It explains why upgrading skills was so important to the Nursing Attendant students and outlines the challenges they had to face before they could qualify for the program. It goes on to describe the courses and concludes with a look at why such programs are timely – why they make practical sense.

WHO IS THIS PUBLICATION FOR

Education at Work presents a retraining program that works for both employer and employee, labour and management. It is our hope that other organizations across the province will use this project as a model in their workplace.

INTRODUCTION

"I was frustrated because I couldn't find enough Registered Nurses and Registered Nursing Assistants to work in Metropolitan Toronto Homes for the Aged. We were always scrambling to find nurses and always competing with the hospitals for qualified staff. I thought we must have the potential within our own workforce for people to move up through the system. The question was, what could we do to help make people ready for the RNA course? The first thing was to make it more convenient for them to continue their education. After all, most of our staff have three jobs: work, school and family. They are busy people."

George Coleman
General Manager
Homes for the Aged Division
Community Services Department
The Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto

Homes for the Aged have considerable difficulty recruiting qualified Registered Nursing Assistants to fill vacancies. And yet, Nursing Attendants are already working there. Some of these employees have qualifications from other countries; many have extensive experience in caring for the elderly. Could the Nursing Attendants use these assets and advance their careers? The next step up the career ladder for Nursing Attendants is the Registered Nursing Assistant position, RNA. (The wage difference between a Nursing Attendant and a RNA is $1.17 an hour at the top end of the 1991 wage scale.) The only way to become a RNA is to pass a set of qualifying examinations and to receive certification.

Employees, instead of being locked into wage and job ghettos, would then have the opportunity for better wages, enhanced job skills, greater job satisfaction and a strong sense of personal accomplishment. With retraining, employees could put their skills, experience and seniority to work.

If management can help Nursing Attendants to acquire their RNA certificates, Metro could potentially fill the RNA positions from within the Homes for the Aged's own workforce. This would mean a savings in resources and start-up time.

The benefits would extend to unions, through increased job opportunities and employment equity.

"We should be offering Education at Work projects right now in industries that we know are downsizing or being phased out. That way we can train workers for new jobs instead of waiting until the plant closes down and everybody is out of work."

George Coleman
General Manager
Homes for the Aged Division
Community Services Department
The Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto

"I thought
we must have the potential
within our own workforce
for people to move
up through the system."

The Partners

In September 1990, The Ontario Women's Directorate and CUPE Local 79 agreed to co-operate in a Change Agent project.

"For years, the union movement has been affirming the basic right to fair and equitable employment practices. My experience in employment equity had been very frustrating. I found that there were hundreds of people who spent thousands of hours writing tens of thousands of pages of reports that cost thousands of dollars and nothing came out at the end – except paper. There was nothing tangible except a group of people patting each other on the back. My membership wanted to see results. They had enough of discussions and reports.

"So I was sceptical when I went to the first meeting of the Employment Equity Implementation Task Force of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto. I indicated to them that we should consider some short-term projects that could realize some results. The committee finally agreed to endorse a pilot project while doing some long-range planning. So we went to the second meeting with two proposals. One of them was Education at Work.

"Our plan to help Nursing Attendants upgrade to Registered Nursing Assistants appealed to the staff of the Metro Homes for the Aged. Metro realized it meant they could fill job vacancies with people who had experience on the job and who knew the Metro system. So it was a good balance for them. So after much discussion, Education at Work was approved unanimously."

Steven David
President
CUPE Local 79

In this joint labour-management project there were a number of key participants.

CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) Local 79 is the largest municipal union in Canada. The Local represents 9,000 municipal and hospital workers, including 3,000 full-time and part-time workers in the Metropolitan Toronto Homes for the Aged. CUPE Local 79 is a strong advocate of employment equity programs. It took the lead in developing and carrying out the Education at Work pilot project.

Homes for the Aged, Community Services Department of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto provides residential and extended care and services to 2,700 residents. Homes for the Aged employs 1,200 Nursing Attendants, 140 Registered Nursing Assistants and 400 Registered Nurses. The management of Homes for the Aged has had considerable difficulty in recruiting qualified Registered Nursing Assistants to fill vacancies. If management can help Nursing Attendants to acquire RNA certificates, then there is the potential for Metro to fill the RNA positions from its own workforce.

Centennial College is the eastern Toronto Community College of Applied Arts and Technology. In its School of Health Sciences, Centennial offers courses leading to the certification of Registered Nurses and Registered Nursing Assistants. As well, Centennial offers an array of access programs to quality students for RN and RNA courses.

The Ontario Women's Directorate is a central advocacy agency within the Ontario government. It reports to the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues. The directorate works to enable the government to achieve its commitment to the economic, legal, and social equality of women in Ontario.

The Employment Equity Implementation Task Force of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto and the Advisory Committee on Homes for the Aged Division have endorsed Education at Work. The project is also supported by the Human Resource Development and Employment Equity Division.

The OWD and CUPE Local 79 signed a formal "Change Agent" agreement in September 1990. The Change Agent program brings together workers and their employers to launch projects that will benefit women in the workplace and demonstrate employment equity.

In setting out the goals and the framework of the project, they had three main objectives:

- to develop a model for training entry-level staff in Homes for the Aged and similar health or social care facilities. The training would prepare entry-level staff to qualify for more specialized, career-oriented training, allowing them to move into better paying jobs within the organization or elsewhere in the health and social services industry;
- to develop and establish a means of assessing the employee's learning needs. The assessment process should reflect the employees' career goals, the employer's objectives, and the entry requirements of the educational institutions providing the specialized training;
- to produce a report on the project that could be shared with employers, unions and municipalities interested in establishing similar projects in their workplaces across Ontario.

WHO WAS INVOLVED

Each participating agency contributed to the program.

- The Ontario Women's Directorate provided financial support for the Education at Work pilot project and the final report on the project.
- The Homes for the Aged, Community Services Department of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto agreed to give workers one hour of paid time for every two hours of class time. Classes were held at or near the worksite (one of the Metro Homes). Day and evening workers attended classes during their regular shifts, while night-shift workers attended on their own time.
- Centennial College developed the curriculum and hired the teachers.
- CUPE Local 79 administered the project and provided ongoing support to participants. The most important participants, of course, were the students.

THE OBSTACLES

Ninety-six per cent of the 1,200 full-time and part-time Nursing Attendants in the 10 Metro Toronto Homes for the Aged are women. More than 50 per cent are members of racial minority groups.

The main stumbling block Nursing Attendants face in becoming RNAs is a lack of formal qualifications. The experience and qualifications these women have earned in other countries are

often not recognized. In addition, limited formal education makes it difficult for many to advance beyond their current positions.

Those Nursing Attendants who seek to up-grade their skills face three main obstacles:

- academic barriers - specifically, the English, math and Health Sciences portions of the qualifying exam to enter the RNA certificate course at community colleges in Ontario. These courses are stumbling blocks for the many women whose English and math levels are below entry-level requirements;
- work and family responsibilities - it's difficult for employees to do it all: work shifts, take care of families, as well as attend classes, prepare assignments and study for exams;
- costs - the price of tuition, books, and care-givers for children or elderly relatives often adds up to more than employees can afford. For them, returning to school full-time is a luxury; they need to keep earning an income. Retraining on a part-time basis, allows them to continue working while studying.

GETTING THE PROJECT OFF THE GROUND

According to Muriel Collins, Membership Secretary, CUPE Local 79, the Homes for the Aged had for years been hesitant about encouraging people to go back to school for a certificate diploma if the certificate didn't benefit the employer. Yet Collins and others were convinced that single mothers and minority women in particular could be motivated to go back to school.

"Finally, we decided to go out to the Homes. We went from Home to Home talking to people in every department - from dietary to nursing. We devoted most of our time to women in lower-paying jobs. We asked people, 'do you plan to stay with Metro?' Ninety per cent said 'yes.' 'Would you like to go back to school?' Most people said 'yes.' 'Would you be interested in taking a Registered Nurse or Registered Nursing Assistant course that would benefit you in asking for a promotion at the home?' The response was really very, very good. We got the backing of the workers, and that's how we came up with the plan for Education at Work."

Once CUPE Local 79 had the go-ahead for the Education at Work pilot project, they sent more than 2,000 flyers to employees at seven Homes for the Aged in Metropolitan Toronto. The flyers described the Registered Nursing Assistant Preparation Course, answered the most likely questions, and outlined the steps for taking the two screening tests. The response was overwhelming. Two-hundred and thirty-seven people signed up to write the qualifying tests.

Steven David,
President of CUPE Local 79:

"We wanted to give everybody an opportunity to find out where they stood educationally, even if they didn't want to do an RNA or an RN. We were really staggered by the volume of response....So many said, 'We are proud to have this chance. We have never been offered this opportunity before to see how we are doing.'"

QUALIFYING FOR THE PROGRAM

Centennial College conducted two levels of screening: Select-A-Level and The Canadian Adult Achievement Test.

Select-A-Level:

This 25-minute multiple choice test screens for grades 1 through 4 equivalency, 5 through 8, and grades 9-12. The test was offered at three Homes for the Aged at six different times so that all employees would have ample opportunity to take the test on their own time. The Supervisor of Staff Development in each home provided in-service education before the test because many of the staff were unfamiliar with the multiple choice format.

Centennial College sent confidential letters to each participant, ranking them on one of the three levels. One hundred and thirty-eight staff achieved Level C - the equivalent of formal education from grades 9-12 and above; they were eligible to move on to the next stage of testing. Ninety-nine people scored in the Levels A (grades 1 to 4) and B (grades 5 to 8) range. Although they were not eligible to go to the next screening test, upgrading alternatives were suggested to them. In this way, all 237 participants received an assessment of their skills and advice to assist them in career development.

Canadian Adult Achievement Test, Level C:

This is a three-hour, in-depth, multiple choice test designed to assess reading comprehension, vocabulary, math and science. Centennial College conducted the test at three separate times and locations. Of the 138 employees who were eligible for this stage of the screening process, six participants declined. One hundred and thirty-two employees wrote the test.

Again, Centennial College sent confidential letters to all participants. Of the 132 employees who wrote the test, 57 qualified to proceed with the Education at Work RNA Preparation course.

Ten of these employees did so well, in fact, that they were advised to apply directly to the RNA program at Centennial College! The remaining people who did not qualify were given advice on adult education courses and invited to contact specific counsellors at Centennial College and at the union.

"We are proud
to have this chance.
We have never
been offered this
opportunity before . . ."

The Students

After the testing was completed, 52 of the 57 eligible employees decided they wanted to participate in the Education at Work pilot project and to enroll in the Registered Nursing Assistant Preparation Course.

The students came from a variety of ethnic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds. Among their first languages were Tagalog, Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish, and Malay.

Seventy-nine per cent of the students had worked in the Homes for the Aged from one to ten years. Twenty-one per cent had worked there for 11 years or longer.

Approximately 50 per cent of the students had less than a grade 12 education, which is generally considered a barrier to enroling in community college courses. When asked about their career goals, they were equally divided between Registered Nursing Assistant and Registered Nurse.

"I was really glad when this program was introduced. We all were. It was posted on the board at work and I thought, 'well, I'll just give it a try.' 'You never know until you try.'"

CONCEPCION DE JESUS (STUDENT)

"I was studying at the university back home in the Philippines to be a nurse. But then my mother sponsored me to come to Canada, so I gave up my nursing course in my last year. When I arrived in 1981, I tried to go back to school, but I had to do all my health and sciences courses over again. Then I still had to take an exam to see whether I could get into nursing. It depressed me so much that I said, 'forget it, I will wait.' And I waited and waited and time just kept going by.

"Now I am married and I have two children. Anthony George (A.J.) is three-and-a-half and my daughter Kathleen is 18 months. And my husband and I have bought a house which we are paying for. When you work, have children and have debts to pay, you think only about the present and not of the future.

"I started working for Metro Homes for the Aged as a Nursing Attendant in 1982. At first, I worked part-time in two different Homes to make up my hours. Since 1988, I have been full-time. That means I am guaranteed 10 days on a regular shift every two weeks.

"I was really glad when this program was introduced. We all were. It was posted on the board at work and I thought, 'well, I'll just give it a try.' 'You never know until you try.' So far I am not doing badly. My sister and niece live with us and they help me a lot. When I get home the kids are fed and bathed and all I have to do is cook, eat, wash the dishes and get down to study. My husband works in the finance department at Sunnybrook Hospital and he helps me with my math sometimes.

"If you really want to do it, you will. It is very important to me to be upgrading myself and this course is giving me the opportunity. It will take me a long time, but I know I can finally become a nurse - something I started so long ago in the Philippines."

THE COURSE

Employees were guaranteed acceptance into Centennial College's RNA program once they successfully completed the RNA Preparation Course. Funding from CUPE Local 79 and the Ontario Women's Directorate covered the costs of tuition and books as well as the ongoing services of a union counsellor.

The course, developed by Centennial College, consisted of four modules:

English

Pre-Pharmacology Math

Biology

Health Sciences Core Concepts

Classes lasted two hours and were held twice a week. The class times overlapped with the end of the day shift and the beginning of the afternoon shift. One hour of class time was paid by the employer; the other hour was on the employee's time.

Since the classes were held outside the workplace, Metro Homes for the Aged gave employees paid travel time either from work to class or from class to work. The four modules took 70 weeks to complete.

EDUCATION AT WORK: English Module

The English module began November 12, 1990 and continued until March 3, 1991. Due to the range of fluency in English, the students were divided into two groups: native English speakers and English as a second language. There were 31 students in Writing Skills and 21 students in Preparatory English for Second Language Speakers. Of the 52 students enroled in both groups, 42 passed and were eligible to take the second module - Pre-pharmacology Math.

"I was very pleased at the talent and abilities among the workers. One comment I heard a lot after the classes started was 'They thought we were stupid. They were wrong. We aren't.'"

Steven David
President
CUPE Local 79

"A few of the women in my class were qualified nurses in their own countries. It must be depressing for them to be working in positions below their capabilities."

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PAT SINGH, TEACHER:

"I saw right from the beginning that the students were determined. Most of the women had lived here for a long time, but they had never had the opportunity to improve their English or to get into a career that really interested them. Some had grown children, four or five had young children, and a couple were grandmothers. But they all wanted to work hard. They always made it to class. I remember one time in the winter there was such a bad storm that all the classes were cancelled. Two students showed up anyway.

"I taught them for four hours a week. We began each class by checking their homework. Then we did a lesson and reviewed grammar and did some exercises or wrote a small composition or report. The students were very good and very focused. They never wanted to take a break.

"They had similar backgrounds - they were all working in Homes for the Aged - so they had that in common, and they were working toward the same goal. Many of them knew each other or knew the Homes where the other women worked. That made them more of a group and made the classes go more smoothly. My group did very well. They all passed. Even the weakest person improved dramatically.

"A few of the women in my class were qualified nurses in their own countries. It must be depressing for them to be working in positions below their capabilities. They all had jobs and families to take care of. But they were looking for a way out of the wage and job ghetto and a way to fulfil themselves. This is a wonderful opportunity for them.

"It is quite a commitment to go on studying for two years. Even though they have the support of the Education at Work project, they have to put a lot in it themselves. The program gave them a lot of confidence. They found out that they could study whatever their ages and their family responsibilities. And they learned that they could be nurses if they really wanted to. If they make it right through the four modules, I don't see any reason why they won't be able to continue studying on their own to be Registered Nursing Assistants or Registered Nurses."

Pre-pharmacology Mathematics Module

Math classes began on April 8, 1991 and finished on May 29, 1991. Of the 42 students eligible to start the course, only one decided not to continue in the program. The course applied arithmetic and metric measurement to pharmacology. It also reviewed whole numbers, decimals, fractions, percentages, and ratios to calculate metric dosage solutions, rate of flow, and body mass.

Classes were held twice a week — Mondays and Wednesdays, from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. At first, students were worried because they had not studied math in a long time; they were afraid they would fail math and be forced to drop out of the program.

Many of the students did not know each other. To encourage them, representatives from the union, the Homes for the Aged, and Centennial College made occasional visits.

The students did very well in the final exam: twenty received grades of "A" or "B." No one failed the course. However, three students dropped out. (One is no longer working, one had medical problems and another withdrew because of stress.) Thirty-eight students became eligible to go on to the Biology module.

Biology Module

The Biology module began July 15 and ended on December 4, 1991. Classes were held at Centennial College where the 38 students were able to use laboratory facilities.

The Biology module was designed to give students an introductory understanding of complex inter-actions within living environments, and between living and non-living environments. The course included an introduction to ecology, treatment of human tissues, and biotic communities and populations. It also covered genes in human populations, infectious diseases, and the effect of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs on human health. Finally, the students learned applied biology at the social level.

"For me it is worth all this work and rush because I like to keep myself active, and it is something I have always wanted to do . . . I would never have been able to do the course without this program. I am so pleased."

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ROSHAN KHAN (STUDENT)

"I came from Guyana in South America in January 1984. In Guyana I worked in a store as a supervisor and then I worked for the government helping people with their problems and keeping records. I always wanted to be a nurse, but after I left school, I got married and then the kids came. I had five children. My husband passed away many years ago and I never remarried. I had to devote myself to my children.

"When my daughter sponsored me to come here, I saw there were so many opportunities. I did one month of clinical training here and then I did the Health Care Aide program at Seneca College. I have been working for Metro Homes for the Aged for about five years now. I wanted to go further in my studying, but I couldn't see how I could do it. Then I heard about this program from the union.

"First, we did English and then we passed on to Pre-pharmacology Math. Oh, that was hard. I was good at decimals and fractions, but I had never done the metric system. My daughter helped me cope with that and I did well in the test.

"Now I am doing biology. I have never done biology or chemistry. That makes it hard, but what makes it harder is that we have to cover so much in the classes. It would be better if we met three times a week instead of twice. We aren't students who are fresh from school. I haven't been in school for 25 years. We rush into class, then we rush to work. Because I work the evening shift, I reach home about 1:00 a.m. and then I sleep in until 8:00 a.m. When do we have time to study?

"For me it is worth all this work and rush because I like to keep myself active, and it is something I have always wanted to do. I love to take care of people. I have always been doing it — with my mother and children. I would never have been able to do the course without this program. I am so pleased. I would never quit unless I couldn't pass the exams."

EDUCATION AT WORK:
Study Support Systems

As the project progressed, the issues that concerned the Nursing Attendants changed. At first, they wanted to discuss their career goals, and some were worried about the screening tests to determine who was eligible to take the course. Once the course started, questions arose about the length of time allowed by the employer in the work/travel arrangements. Balancing work with family and study priorities was a constant concern.

CUPE Local 79, the Homes for the Aged, and Centennial College offered support to the students throughout the project. Many problems were prevented simply by answering questions quickly and talking about issues individually and in group discussions. The on-going success of the project depended in large measure on this support network.

The union designated a Union Counsellor at the Local 79 office who answered calls each day, visited the classes, and telephoned students every month. The active role of the Union Counsellor was an important element in the success of this project.

The Staff Development Supervisor in each Home offered guidance during the work day about the program and educational alternatives. Centennial College wrote to every worker at each stage of the assessment process to explain results and offer counselling services. The college also monitored the progress of the students through discussions with the teachers.

Initially, replacing staff who were attending classes posed a problem. It was resolved through creative scheduling and the co-operation and flexibility of fellow workers, participants, and Head Nurses. Many participants turned to the Union Counsellor, the Staff Development Supervisor, or the teachers for encouragement to keep going, particularly during the tough math and biology modules. As the project neared completion, several participants expressed concerns about continuing their studies on their own without the benefit of free tuition and books, and time off work.

Health Sciences Core Concepts

Health Sciences Core Concepts was the bridge between Education at Work and the Registered Nursing Assistant or Registered Nursing Program at Centennial College. This fourth and final part of the RNA Preparation course, began January 6 and ended on June 29, 1992.

Health Sciences Core Concepts had two components. The first, the Health Sciences Core Concepts course, served as an introduction to the range of course material offered in the RNA and RN programs. Students who passed this course satisfactorily would be accepted into the School of Health Sciences RNA or RN programs at Centennial College.

The second component (Health Sciences II) was a life skills course to help students in the Education at Work project make the transition from a workplace environment to the unknown pressures of the community college setting. Sessions covered financial planning, career counselling, time management, and a presentation by a Nursing Attendant currently enroled in the program. This course was designed in consultation with staff from Metro Homes for the Aged and Metro's Human Resource Development and Employment Equity Division.

"It's better to start the preparation course now than not to start at all. I'm 49 and time is passing ... Nothing can frighten me, nothing can stop me because I am determined."

Margarita Bolosan (student)

"It's been 30 years since I left school and you forget things like biology and chemistry. It can be tough to catch up, but I am ambitious and I will. Back home, I was an elementary teacher. I came to Canada in 1980 as a contract worker. I didn't understand at first how to get my landed status, so I worked for five years as a nanny and I took my Health Care Worker's certificate at night.

"I've been working for Metro Homes for three years as a Nursing Attendant. I was lucky because I became full-time after only one year. I work nights and during the day I help my niece by taking care of her son. My husband and I don't have any children, but we have two nieces we support and my niece who lives here with her son. My husband came to Canada three years ago and we are paying for a house. On weekends I work at a senior citizens' home.

"Our Staff Development Supervisor told me about the RNA Preparation Course and I saw the notice posted on the bulletin board. My niece works in another Metro Home, so I suggested we take the exam. I was so happy when we received the letters saying we had passed the first and second tests and we had qualified to take the course.

"I want to become a nurse because I want to work with people - especially older people. I feel compassion for them, and I want to help them. I want to be an RN, but I will register first for the RNA program. If I get an excellent mark, I will shift over to the RN program. If I go full-time, it will take me three years to do the RN course. If I pass every exam and qualify to do the RN program, I would love that because it would mean I could go to school in the days and work nights.

"It's better to start the preparation course now than not to start at all. I'm 49 and time is passing. Some of my friends ask me how I manage and I tell them, 'I'm not sitting down idling.' If I say I'll complete my five pages tonight, I do it, no matter how tired I am. Nothing can frighten me, nothing can stop me because I am determined."

The Outcome

Education at Work was completed in June 1992. Of the 52 students who began the RNA Preparation course in November 1990, 38 remained. The drop-out rate for this program has been considerably lower than the rate found in other full-time pre-health courses.

"It is possible to improve the lot of people trapped in the wage ghetto. Financial support to cover costs, tuition, and books is vital. Time off work is an absolute must, and so is developing flexible management, an understanding teaching staff, and a support system in the workplace."

Steven David
President
CUPE Local 79

The support of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto will continue, with the municipality paying 50 per cent of all tuition costs for students who successfully complete a work-related course.

CONCLUSION Rx for success

For the students, this pilot project was highly successful. It provided upgrading equal to high-school levels in English, pre-pharmacology, math, and biology. These courses will give employees the academic background they need to pursue a post-secondary Health Sciences program at Centennial College.

Not only were the students able to move up the career ladder, they gained added confidence and a greater self-awareness. Even if they do not enroll in the Registered Nursing Assistant or Registered Nursing programs, their lives have been enriched both personally and professionally.

The union, the employer and the community college also benefited. This pilot project can be used by CUPE Local 79 in assisting its members to move out of the wage ghetto and up the career ladder. At the same time, the union has pioneered a model of successful labour-management collaboration that can be applied in other workplaces.

The Homes for the Aged now has a more highly-trained and confident workforce. This is a significant advantage considering the chronic shortage of Registered Nursing Assistants. Once their RNA training is completed, Metro will be able to promote employees from within - and to fill vacancies with those already trained in Metro's system.

Centennial College contributed to the community by designing and delivering an access program that meets the career needs and aspirations of a highly motivated group of workers.

"I think there are several reasons why this project has been so successful. We assigned a Union Counsellor to work regularly with the students, so people who had family or other problems could share them with somebody who could help them find solutions. The other main reason was that the workers taking the course supported each other. The line managers and teachers supported them too, but it was important that they were all together and part of a class."

Steven David
President
Cupe Local 79

"Don't hog the credit is my advice as the employer. The success of Education at Work depends upon a good working relationship among staff, employer and union. It is a joint workplace initiative."

George Coleman
General Manager
Homes for the Aged Division
Community Services Department
The Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto

BENEFITS Beyond the Fringe

As Canada moves into the next century and competes in a global marketplace, it becomes clearer that its greatest resource is people. Many of these people are new Canadians who bring with them skills and education that are not recognized in their new country. Many are underemployed; and yet a boost such as this pilot program offered is often all they need. It may be what Canada needs too, if it is going to utilize the real potential of its population. This program demonstrated that there are practical, cost-effective ways to upgrade our workforce, and that many workers will seize the chance to retrain and upgrade their skills. In this case, the Nursing Attendants showed, by their tenacity and diligence, that with some finely-tuned assistance, it is possible to leave a job ghetto for a career.

George Coleman
General Manager
Homes for the Aged Division
Community Services department
The Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto:

"After the Employment Equity Committee at Metropolitan Toronto Council endorsed CUPE Local 79's Education at Work Project, it was my job as the employer to negotiate with management at the homes. If you are a Head Nurse running a unit, you want your staff on the floor. It was a matter of selling the long-term benefits of having more qualified staff, over the short-term costs of giving people time off work to go to classes. We had to organize it so that we didn't take five people off a unit at the same time.

"I can't see the financial dollars ever being available to hire replacement staff. Besides, it is almost impossible to get replacement workers for an hour at a time. What is available within Metro Homes is flexibility. Full-time workers can become part-time so that they can work four days and study three days. Or we can move people from days to nights. There is nothing else we can do except to take people right out of the workforce and put them into classrooms. That is extremely expensive."

Has it been worth it? Yes, for sure. I'd definitely support the idea of offering the program again. Of course, there are some things I would do differently next time. Well, I didn't do enough thinking about the classroom space, and that made it quite disruptive at the beginning of the project.

We will pay 80 per cent of the tuition costs for those who go on to take the RN A course. We want to recognize what they have achieved. Upgrading makes the staff more confident and improves their self-esteem. That makes them better workers, and the residents in our homes will benefit.

"Has it been worth it?
Yes, for sure.
I'd definitely support
the idea of offering
the program again."

Who We Are:

Ontario Women's Directorate

The Ontario Women's Directorate (OWD) is a central agency within the Ontario government, reporting to the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues. Through policy development and review, program co-ordination, consultation and public education, the directorate assists the Government of Ontario to achieve its commitment to the economic, legal and social equality of women in Ontario. Of particular concern to the OWD are the special needs of aboriginal, racial minority, francophone, immigrant and northern women and women with disabilities.

The directorate's Consultative Services Branch works in partnership with women's groups, unions, employers and educators to plan, develop and implement equity initiatives that will benefit women and girls.

SOME OF THE MAJOR AREAS OF FOCUS ARE

- Sexual Harassment
- Education and Training Equity
- Balancing work and family responsibilities
- Encouraging occupational integration, especially to ensure the entrance of more women into trades and technology.

In order to achieve these goals, the branch provides a wide range of services to those who are beginning to implement initiatives or who wish to expand already existing programs in support of women's equity through a range of services including:

- information publications and resource materials
- development of role-modelling programs for educators
- consultation
- educational and training videos
- opportunities to exchange ideas with other organizations through Change Agent demonstration projects.

Consultative Services Branch also has a community grants program to support community-based women's projects.

For Further Information Contact:

Consultative Services Branch
Ontario Women's Directorate
12th Floor, 2 Carlton Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5B 2M9
(416) 314-0300

Thunder Bay Office
107C Johnson Avenue
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7B 2V9
(807) 345-6084.

CUPE LOCAL 79

CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) Local 79 is the largest municipal union in Canada. The Local represents 9,000 municipal and hospital workers, including 3,000 full-time and part-time workers in the Metropolitan Toronto Homes for the Aged. CUPE Local 79 is a strong advocate of employment equity programs.

If you would like to know more about the Education at Work project implemented by CUPE 79, please contact:

Canadian Union of Public Employees
(CUPE) Local 79
257 Adelaide St. West, 3rd Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M5H 1X9
(416) 977-1629.

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Ontario
Women's
Directorate

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